The Story of Maya (8 months old)

Summary: Maya's case illustrates how very young babies react to the trauma of physical abuse, neglect, and medical trauma. It also depicts how with thoughtful, consistent care, babies can resume their normal developmental course and learn to trust others to take care of them.

Maya wakes up crying in the middle of the night.

When her Aunt Jenna tries to soothe her, Maya arches her back, pushes her hands against Jenna's shoulders, and screams even harder.

When Jenna tries to make eye contact with Maya, the baby turns her head away.

"This little baby makes me feel completely rejected," Jenna says. "Sometimes I feel so helpless, I just have to put her down and let her cry."

Background

Maya was taken into care after her 17-year-old mother Angela brought her to the ER unconscious, with two broken arms and bruises.

Maya and her mother Angela had been living with her mother's abusive boyfriend, Remy. The police had received frequent reports of loud arguments and a baby crying in Angela and Remy's apartment, but Child Protective Services was never called in.

For a brief time recently, Angela and Maya had lived in a shelter for victims of domestic violence, but Angela had returned to Remy. Angela claimed Maya was hurt while in the shelter.

Before being placed with Jenna, Maya spent some time hospitalized, and in casts that made it impossible for her to move her arms.

Since coming to live with her aunt, Maya has trouble sleeping, startles easily, and cries when she hears loud voices. She also avoids physical contact, and screams when taken on medical visits.

Recognizing Resilience

Jenna has discovered that Maya is most comfortable taking her bottle if it is propped up so she can hold it herself.

After Jenna played a particularly soothing piece of classical music every time she fed Maya, the baby began to calm down when she heard the music.

One evening, Jenna began to hum the tune as she gave Maya her bottle, and Maya made eye contact with her.